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17 March 1967

DIA DECLASSIFICATION/RELEASE INSTRUCTIONS ON FILE

MEMORANDUM FOR: The Honorable W. W. Rostow
Special Assistant to the President

SUBJECT : Transmittal of Requested Memorandum

Per your request we have prepared the attached memorandum on the erosion of the Communist cadre structure in South Vietnam.

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[REDACTED]
Special Assistant for Vietnamese Affairs

Attachment

Distribution:

Original & 1 - Addressee, w/att.

1 - Mr. Komer, w/att.

1 - Secretary Rusk, w/att.

1 - Assistant Secretary Bundy, w/att.

1 - Mr. Hughes, w/att.

1 - Secretary McNamara, w/att.

1 - Asst. Secretary McNaughton, w/att.

1 - General Carroll, w/att.

25X1A9a 1 - [REDACTED] DCI, w/att.

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1 - OCI

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1 - FE/VNO

1 - CFE

1 - VAS Chrono

1 - GAC Chrono

✓ 1 - Special Projects - White House

1 - VC Morale

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DATE: 17 March 1967

TO: The Director of Central Intelligence

FROM: [REDACTED]

SUBJECT: Attachment

REMARKS: Attached is one of the memoranda Rostow requested, forwarded for your inspection prior to transmission. It was drafted by your Vietnamese Affairs Staff but has been coordinated with OCI, ONE and FE Division. It, thus, reflects an Agency position.

[REDACTED]
Special Assistant for Vietnamese Affairs

Attachment

Copies of Attachment, Sent to:

Mr. Komer, Secretary Rusk,
Assistant Secretary Bundy, Mr. Hughes
Secretary McNamara, Asst. Secretary
McNaughton, General Carroll

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17 March 1967

MEMORANDUM

The Erosion of the Communist Cadre Structure

Summary

Communist cadres,* the cement which holds the Viet Cong organization together, are becoming increasingly discouraged. Under mounting Allied pressures, many of the best have been killed or maimed, and the replacements are generally inferior to the casualties.

The deterioration in cadre morale and effectiveness has been uneven, and more pronounced at the lower levels than the higher. This deterioration is partially the result of the Communists' own late 1964 decision to stress mobile warfare in the hope of a quick victory. To develop the Main Force units necessary for such a victory, the Viet Cong drained off large numbers of low-level cadres from their control apparatus in the countryside. This produced an imbalance in their structure which left the Viet Cong vulnerable in rural areas, where--according to captured documents--their hold on the people is slipping.

While the introduction of North Vietnamese personnel has eased the leadership problem to some extent in Main Force units, it has produced frictions

*The word "cadre" in this discussion is defined as one who has the rank of assistant squad leader or above in the Communist Army, or his civilian equivalent.

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with regionally sensitive "southerners." Local forces have had even greater leadership problems, stemming largely from their lower priority in obtaining guerrilla replacements. Guerrilla forces, however, had the most serious cadre problems because of extraordinarily large levies for manpower to meet higher level requirements. Both the quality and quantity of irregular manpower have declined, and the resultant weakening of the Viet Cong position in rural areas is now receiving top level Communist attention.

The quality of Viet Cong political cadres has similarly declined, and for many of the same reasons. Higher levels have expressed concern over the ineffectiveness and demoralization of political cadre in the countryside, which has reduced the enemy's capability to oppose pacification and revolutionary development activities.

To check the erosion of their control apparatus and its mass organizations, the Viet Cong are attempting to bolster leadership at lower echelons. This is also necessary to enable the Communists to carry out their planned new emphasis on guerrilla and political actions. There are indications that they are at least partially reversing the flow of cadre and tightening up their organization, particularly at lower levels. This down-shifting, however, is a risky undertaking: it may weaken the upper echelons, may discourage those sent down to redeem Viet Cong fortunes in the countryside and may further lower cadre morale by being seen as an admission of a failure of past strategies. As Allied pressures mount, the trend toward disintegration of the Communist apparatus almost certainly will become increasingly pronounced, though the present effects of Communist problems should not be exaggerated. Their political and military organization is still large and formidable even though it is subject to ever increasing strains.

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Background

1. Recently captured documents indicate that through early 1966 the Communists still felt that their position in South Vietnam was sufficiently favorable to achieve a decisive victory in a short period of time by a combination of military and political action. Thus, while maintaining that its strategy was still based on the "protracted war" concept, the documents reveal that Hanoi had also adopted the strategy of a rapid build-up of Communist main force elements in the hope that they could inflict enough defeats on Allied forces to erode their will to continue the struggle. But their subsequent military reverses, the collapse of the 1966 anti-government "struggle movement," the government's progress toward developing representative institutions, and the evolving pacification-revolutionary development program, have created growing morale problems within Viet Cong military units and confusion and uneasiness within their political organization.

Military Cadres

2. The over-all quality of Communist military cadres continues to deteriorate gradually, as it has since mid-1965, when the Viet Cong cause reached its high water mark. The decay has been uneven, more pronounced in some types of units than in others, and varies considerably from region to region. The deterioration is least evident in the Main Forces; it is most advanced among the guerrillas and militia who serve in the villages and hamlets.

3. North Vietnamese cadres are still relatively good. A year-old assessment by MACV--that "one of the North Vietnamese Army's (NVA's) strongest assets is the quality of its cadre"--seems as valid today as it was when it was written. Defector and POW statistics would appear to bear this out. As of February 1967, only some 200 NVA soldiers had

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defected, while slightly fewer than a thousand had surrendered.* With some exceptions--notably [REDACTED] who rallied last August--the average NVA soldier falling into Allied hands is a private.

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4. The quality of southern cadres in the Main Force, on the other hand, has been much more difficult to maintain. Until recently the Viet Cong have drawn heavily on Local Force or guerrilla units for Main Force cadre replacements. This source is apparently beginning to dry up. A high level (possibly COSVN) Viet Cong document captured late last year in Communist MR I indicated that considerable administrative friction has developed between guerrilla and higher level units over the latters' continual personnel raids. "In some areas," the document stated, guerrilla commanders "went as far as forbidding the guerrillas" (including cadres) from enlisting in Main Force units. Even where such cadres are still available, the results are far from satisfactory. A document captured in MR VI complained of the "poor qualifications" of the up-graded cadre, indicating that they "failed in their missions," and had a poor attitude in combat.

5. The Viet Cong have tried to meet this problem in two ways. First, they have increasingly resorted to using northern cadre to lead southern soldiers, a practice the southerners resent. Second, the Viet Cong have lowered their standards for promotion to cadre status--with predictable results. Neither expedient yet seems to have seriously effected the over-all performance of the southern Main Force, however, which by most accounts is still good.

6. Local Force units--subordinate to provinces and districts--have had even greater difficulties

*That is, about 1 percent of the total number of northern infiltrators. The campaign most productive so far of the NVA captives was fought in November 1965, at Ia Drang Valley.

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than the Main Force in maintaining leadership standards. They, too, are dependent on the guerrillas for cadre replacements and are, therefore, running into the same personnel difficulties. Their problem is greater, however, since they have a lower priority than the Main Force in obtaining guerrillas. Moreover, the Local Forces are subject, like the guerrillas, to personnel drafts for the Main Force, a practice which weakens the Local Forces.

7. As might be expected, the irregulars have had the most serious problems over the quality of cadre. Captured documents indicate that a major "extraordinary" draft of guerrillas--amply staffed with cadres--occured in July 1965. Further levies continued through 1966, in response to a COSVN directive (captured in MR I) which required the upgrading of one-third of all hamlet and village guerrillas during that year. Documents and POW interrogations attest to the unfortunate consequences of this action. In mid-1966, a COSVN-level cadre observed in his notebook (captured in Operation CEDAR FALLS) that not only the quantity but the quality of guerrillas had declined. Lower level documents frequently complain of the inadequacies of the irregular forces and their cadres. A region-level communique of October 1966 noted, for example, that village cadres and guerrillas stationed along Route 1 had become demoralized and dispirited by Allied helicopter raids. Their resistance plans, he stated, had become passive. A report from a Viet Cong village in Tay Ninh Province declared that the local cadres and guerrillas had turned "to the enemy." Another document captured in MR I noted that a local village unit was inactivated because its members--cadres and all--had evaporated. Guerrilla prisoners frequently speak ill of their leaders. In one case, a captive indicated that the head of his village guerrilla unit was a deserter from the Main Force.

8. Although the Viet Cong may be having problems with the quality of their military cadres, and stresses are obviously developing within their military establishment, the present effect of these problems should not be exaggerated. Their military

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establishment is still formidable and large. The notebook which, in mid-1966, noted a decline in the quantity of "guerrillas" said that there were 180,000-- or some 70,000 more than the number of irregulars carried in the MACV's present Order of Battle.* Given the Viet Cong's organizational skill, and their seeming ability to prod adequate performances from sometimes mediocre people, the low-level cadre structure is not likely to disintegrate while mid-level leaders are actively pursuing the war.

Political Cadres

9. The over-all quality of Viet Cong "political" cadres, like that of the military, is in a state of decline, and for many of the same reasons. Allied units have entered many regions long considered Viet Cong-controlled and in some areas have wreaked havoc on the Viet Cong political apparatus. In South Vietnam's most populous province, Binh Dinh, there has been over the last year a major shift of population from areas under Communist control to regions at least nominally controlled by the government. In neighboring Phu Yen Province, a Viet Cong document captured early in 1967 stated that "the ratio of population under our control in the whole province is one-third that of early 1966." The report added that the Viet Cong in Phu Yen had been able to recruit only 659 soldiers--22 percent of their goal.

10. Defection statistics indicate, however, that political cadre problems are much more serious at the lower levels than the upper. The pattern is evident in a recent study of Chieu Hoi statistics jointly compiled by RAND and MACV. The study determined that some 25 percent of the ralliers listed in weekly defector reports as "civilians" had cadre

*The MACV OB currently carries 112,760 as the number of VC irregulars. An entry in another notebook belonging to a COSVN-level cadre made in April 1966 stated that there were "180,000 guerrillas" and "150,000 militia," totalling 330,000 irregulars (or about 220,000 more than carried in the OB). MACV is now comparing and evaluating the translations in the two notebooks.

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status.* The percentage of civilian (or "political") cadres by their level of service was found to be as follows:

Regional Level	1%
Provincial Level	3%
District Level	13%
Village/Hamlet Level	83%

11. If one applies the MACV/RAND percentages to last year's civilian Chieu Hoi totals--some 7,345 civilians were listed as defectors--one would arrive at a figure of 1,836 civilian cadre ralliers in 1966: 18 from region, 55 from province, 239 from district, and 1,524 from village and hamlet levels.**

12. There are probably several reasons for the unbalanced representation of civilian cadre ralliers at the lowest levels. One, of course, is that there are more of them at that level to defect; but this only partially explains the phenomenon. Captured Viet Cong documents and POW interrogations provide another explanation, namely that the political cadre at the lower levels have been going through the same "upgrading" process as the military cadre. The captured COSVN directive which instructed the wholesale transfer of guerrillas and Local Force troops to the Main Force in mid-1965 also directed the forwarding to upper echelons of large numbers of political cadres. Some of these merely moved to higher political position, but most reported to Main Force

* The determination of cadre status was painstakingly made by a RAND researcher who is well versed in both Viet Cong organization and terminology.

**Although the MACV Order of Battle carries 39,000 political cadre, a recent MACV J-2 analysis indicates that there are probably 48,000 more such cadre serving at hamlet level--where most of the cadre defections occur. If 87,000 (the two figures combined) is accepted as the total number of political cadre, then last year the over-all ratio of civilian cadre ralliers to the total was about two percent.

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units to serve as officers and noncoms. This process, which the Viet Cong came to call "The Reduction in Administrative Personnel" had the net effect of stripping the lower echelons of many of their best people. A COSVN-level document written in the middle of 1966 noted that at that time "20 percent to 30 percent of the competent...cadre" had been transferred from the local levels.

13. Faced with this problem, the Viet Cong have had to temporize and fill vacancies in the cadre ranks with people that at an earlier time might have been considered unqualified. A party directive in Viet Cong Can Tho Province complained in April 1966 of the new cadres' "inability to cope with hardship," ascribing "the drop in quality.../to/ recent heavy recruiting, which resulted in members' putting too much stress on quantity...." The newer cadres are far more prone than their predecessors to desert or defect. In Binh Thuan Province, for example, an "emergency" meeting was called in December 1966 to consider the rising defection and desertion problem among demoralized cadres.

Communist Countermeasures

14. In order to counter these unfavorable trends, the Communists evidently are changing the emphasis in their military and political strategy. Guerrilla warfare and political actions--especially subversion and counterpacification efforts--are to be emphasized to a greater degree than previously. Some Main Force elements in fact will be used to support local guerrillas although the bulk of the enemy Main Force will continue to be employed in opposition to large scale Allied operations.

15. Politically, the Communists appear to be tightening up their control apparatus in the countryside. Recent low-level reports from 16 provinces cite personnel, administrative, and territorial reorganizations, and, in some cases, introduction of North Vietnamese political cadres to supervise or replace local Party agents. These reports do not indicate a general purge, but some regional and

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provincial levels have been told to tighten up their organizations and to remove or replace those local cadres who are not considered reliable or sufficiently enthusiastic in their jobs.

16. There are also indications that the Viet Cong are assigning high level cadres to lower echelon positions. A recent detainee--a PRP member connected to the Can Tho Party committee--said that some of the provincial committee's section leaders had been downgraded to serve at district level. The detainee indicated that the downgrading was not a demotion but was an attempt by the Viet Cong to strengthen the apparatus at the lower echelons. There have been other similar reports which suggest that this may be a general trend.

17. This down-shifting of gears will tend to exacerbate the morale problems of both military and political cadres, since it represents a partial step backwards and thus a tacit admission that the past strategy has failed. Hence the strains that have begun to appear within the Party apparatus will probably worsen in the coming year. As Allied military and political pressures mount, the general Vietnamese tendency toward political fragmentation and regionalism may widen these cracks into serious fissures.

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